Radio club listens to Baghdad transmissions

By Sean Hess
Lantern staff writer

Question: Where on campus can you listen to Radio Baghdad and send free messages to service men worldwide?

Answer: At the Ohio State Amateur Radio Club located in the southeast bell tower of Ohio Stadium.

Amateur Radio Club member Bob Wiley, a senior from Columbus, is a radio operator with the Military Affiliated Radio System. What a MARS operator does is take shortwave signals from the military and patches them in with phone lines here in the United States. Operators also take voice messages from radio, write them down and then deliver them.

"What usually happens is another MARS operator will read the message to me and as I get it read to me I will copy it down word for word," Wiley said. "Then, I will either call the person the message is to, or I will mail it."

MARS operators get free postage for that usage exclusively, he added.

Messages can be sent by anyone to service men worldwide through the MARS network. The only people MARS can't reach right now are ground troops in Saudi Arabia and sailors on certain Navy ships.

In the military, MARS operators are volunteers, usually communications specialists. In Saudi Arabia, there isn't enough manpower and spare time to receive and then deliver MARS messages. However, a soldier in Saudi Arabia can initiate a message or phone call to the United States using MARS. It takes less time and there are plenty of operators in this country willing to receive and deliver messages.

"I've only taken four or five from the Persian Gulf so far," Wiley said. MARS operators are only authorized to contact nine Navy ships: USS Guam, USS Philippines, USS Long Beach, USS Virginia, USS Saratoga, USS Texas, USS Nassau, USS Yellowstone and USS San Jacinto. Wiley said it might be possible to route messages to other ships through these nine, but that is very unlikely.

To send a message to a service member via MARS, the service member's name, rank, branch, address, social security number and phone number (if possible) are needed.

"Tell us the person you want to get a message to and we will take care of the rest... to (almost) any military outpost or stateside base," said Eric Bartholomew, a freshman club member from Columbus.

The radio club also monitors transmissions of Iraq's Radio Baghdad.

The club routinely monitors many nations' broadcasts, and has listened to Iraq off and on since August.

"You know it's there but you just don't turn it on unless something is going on," Wiley said. "Like when something is happening on WNCI, you listen to WNCL."

Club member Rob Peebles, a Ohio State graduate from Columbus, said that Radio Baghdad is somewhat uninteresting and has its share of propaganda.

"They do tend to play some American-type pop music and today (Wednesday) they really didn't have much to say," Peebles said. "They have tried to do some of the old 'Tokyo Rose' tricks in the past, like telling service men that their girlfriends are out with Tom Selleck types." Radio Baghdad usually comes in best between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. The transmission is weak, but the club has a 100-foot tall directional antenna on top of Ohio Stadium which helps drag the signal in.

Wiley said that he likes to listen to and compare the different nations' radio broadcasts from the Persian Gulf region.

"It's like when you hear an account of the Michigan game from seven different people," he said. "Everybody has their own story about what happened, and from the consensus, you get a really good idea of what actually did happen."

Anyone who is interested in listening to Radio Baghdad is invited to show up at the club between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m.

The club currently has about a dozen active members.